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THE MEXICAN MAIZE SEASON IN THE CODEX FEJÉRVÁRY-MAYER

By STANSBURY HAGAR

THE writer has referred in a previous paper to the group of asterisms which Duran pictures as governing the eighteen months of the Mexican year. He indeed sometimes describes these asterisms as planets governing the days of these periods, but elsewhere compares them with our zodiacal signs, and a careful reading of the text makes it clear that he refers to the eighteen Mexican zodiacal asterisms.¹

In this sequence the signs Cancer, Virgo, and Libra are represented respectively by a man standing in flowing water beside a growing maize plant, an emerald (symbol of the Maize Goddess), and a mummy (symbol of the Death God). In the Borgiano and related codices Cancer, Leo, Virgo, and Libra are figured as the Water Goddess, Tezcatlipoca, the Maize God, and the Death God.²

On sheets 33 and 34 of the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, Loubat edition, there are two sequences of interrelated symbols which support these identifications by associating the signs as named with the maturing of the maize crop upon the Mexican plateau.

It is not possible to specify the particular portion of the plateau to which these figures refer, nor is this necessary for our purpose. One writer has suggested the probability that this codex pertains to the Mixtecan or Zapotecan region because of its use of the Maya numeration by bars and dots with the Nahuatl symbols. It suffices for us that there are parts of the plateau where the seasons correctly correspond with the symbols to be described. And the correspondence between the astronomical symbols of the various nations

¹ Duran, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España*, vol. II, Mexico, 1880. Hagar, Zodiacal Elements of the Mexican and Maya Months and Day Signs, *Int. Cong. Americanists*, Mexico, 1910 (not yet published).

² Hagar, Elements of the Maya and Mexican Zodiacs, *Int. Cong. Americanists*, Vienna, 1908, p. 277 et seq.

of Mexico and Yucatan is sufficiently marked to justify comparison between them and between the deities with whom they are associated.

On the lower half of the sheets named (pl. xxxiv), reading from right to left in the usual manner, we see the sequence of deities described above standing with upturned faces before a temple and holding in their right hands an offering to the celestial powers, except that the Sun God takes the place of the Water Goddess. But it is not difficult to see why the Sun God equally pertains to the sign Cancer, for the symbols of this sign are the fire-sticks with which the new fire was lighted at the time of the June solstice, when the sun was supposed to attain his greatest power in the northern hemisphere. At this time at Izamal, in Yucatan, and elsewhere, the sun was represented as an ara of fiery plumage which descended upon an altar at the solstitial noon to consume the offerings there. Both the ritual and the myth evidently refer to solstitial worship of the Sun God, and on sheet 12 of the Cospiano codex he is depicted facing the solstitial temple of light, within which is the fiery ara. This may explain the bird-head above the head of the Sun God, though, according to Seler, the quetzal is represented instead of the ara. Moreover, on the roof of the temple before which the Sun God stands in the Fejérváry-Mayer codex we see the emerald, symbol of the Water Goddess, whose Nahuatl name is *Chalchiuitlicue*, the Emerald Woman. Above the Sun God is the solar disk surrounded by a fiery cloud—the fiery sun of the June solstice. There are also flowers upon the temple roof, and within the temple sits a deity believed by Seler to be the Flower God. He may represent the outburst of flowers with the coming of the rains at this season.

On the lower left side of sheet 33 we see the god who corresponds to the Nahuatl deity Tezcatlipoca presenting the offering, while a puma-head deity sits within the temple. Both Tezcatlipoca and the puma are used as symbols of Leo in the Borgiano Codex group.

In the third group on the right of sheet 34 the Maize God holds the offering, and a variant form of the same deity sits in the temple before a dish which probably contains maize grains. A fruit-bearing plant issuing from the headdress of the standing deity may indicate

the harvest season. The maize deity pertains to Virgo in the Borgiano group. Finally, on the left of sheet 34 the Death God holds the offering before a temple in which the Death Head with the protruding tongue rests upon a chair. This doubtless represents the Nahuatl *tlahťouani*, or oracular priest, who announces the wisdom supposed to be obtained by communion with the spirits of the dead. He and the Death God symbolize the two signs Libra and Scorpio in the Borgiano group and elsewhere.

Passing now to the upper row of figures, the first on the right depicts the Water Goddess supporting a leaning maize plant which is personified as a man and is rooted in water. Above the goddess a cloud tree pours rain upon the burnt offering. The identity of these symbols with the Cancer symbols below them and with Duran's Cancer asterism is evident, so we may interpret them as referring to the upgrowth of the young maize under the influence of the first rains in June and July. In fact Duran, referring to this asterism, writes that the wet season now began and the crops increased in size. In the second tableau on the left the sky is half clouded, half light, suggesting the showers of August. The maize plant, now much more erect, is still supported by a deity, here perhaps a form of the Maize God, who seems to be urging it upward. In the third tableau on the right of sheet 34 the maize plant is now fully erect, and the dark tips of the two ears depict the black corn-silk which marks its ripening. This is the Nahuatl *Xochitl Icacan*, the "Place where flowers stand upright," the paradise of the deities governing food supplies. It is a form of the Tamoanchan, or Garden of the West, the place of origin.¹ A comparison of this symbol with the Tianquitzli, or Market Place, of Sahagun's Virgo asterism reveals a common basic symbolism associated with the productive forces of Nature. In the drawing before us the maize plant is now figured as a woman richly clothed, doubtless the Goddess of the Maize. It is supported by the Rain God, who has brought it to maturity. In Duran's figure a man holds a maize ear with ripe silk. These symbols should correspond in the sequence with the sign of the Maize God, our Virgo, and with the month of September.

¹Seler in Cod. Fejérváry-Mayer, p. 124.

The following drawing represents a small, unfertile plant bearing a single ripe ear. It is attacked by four birds and a mouse, from which it is protected by a warrior deity. The interpretation is not difficult. The sun passes out of the fertile month and sign of the Maize Deity of the harvest into the dry and barren months and signs of Libra and Scorpio. The rains cease and vegetation begins to wither and die, hence the association with death symbols. But in October a scanty harvest of later ripening is still saved from the attacks of birds and mice by the husbandman, who drives them away from his fields.

According to Señor Don Valencia, Director of the Central Agricultural Station of Mexico, whose statement has been kindly procured for me by Prof. Manuel Gamio, of the National Museum, there are many regions on the Mexican plateau where maize can be and is sown in March and reaped in September, although today this is not customary, as maize can be grown with less risk before the season of heavy rains. It is an interesting question whether these pages of the *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer* refer to a ceremonial growing of maize in harmony with the supposed influences of the zodiacal asterisms.

Thus it will be noted that the symbolism of the maize harvest depicted upon the upper half of the sheets mentioned may harmonize with the actual maize season of the Mexican plateau, and that the symbols of each season correspond equally well with those of the zodiacal sign that governs it and which is represented directly below. One day-sign accompanies each of the upper drawings, and five day-signs each of the lower drawings. They undoubtedly refer to some more complex calendric symbolism associated with the sequence of the four signs just described. Only one of them is placed with the zodiacal sign to which it pertains astronomically. But Dr Seler correctly associates the four drawings both above and below with the cardinal points—east, north, west, and south, respectively. Cancer, the dawn sign of the solar year, with its new-fire symbolism, naturally represents the dawn or eastern sign. The Leo asterism is called the Wheel of the North, and its day-sign Eecatl is probably associated with the cold north wind. The

Maize Deity, Tamoanchan, the Western Paradise, and the day-sign Calli, or House, all Virgo symbols, pertain emphatically to the west. This leaves Libra to represent the south, and, though the symbolism here is not so clear, the death attributes of this sign may represent the passage of the sun into the southern signs of drought and dying vegetation.

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